

## TESTIMONY BEFORE CONGRESS

My name is Mary Alice Mankamyer. I am a wife, mother, grandmother, secretary, resident of Shanksville, Pennsylvania and a Volunteer Ambassador to Flight 93.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about our small town of Shanksville, Pa, and share with you some of my thoughts and experiences as a Flight 93 Ambassador and how I feel about placing a fitting memorial plaque here at the Capital Building.

Shanksville is a small Christian Community with 3 churches and only 245 residents. Main Street from one end of town to the school is only about three quarters of a mile long. There you will see, Ida's Country Store, Erica's Salon, Grine's Garage, and Ray Glessner's Barber Shop and at the top of the hill is the Shanksville Stonycreek School with about 500 students from pre-school to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. It is a friendly town that pulls together to help each other.

Shanksville is a very patriotic community. Soon after the crash of Flight 93, only a few miles away, the people in town felt they needed to do something to honor the people who died, so at the edge of town where Doug and Judy Baeckel live, in their yard a small memorial started to take shape. Kim Friedline brought a painted 4X6 piece of plywood for people to sign that eventually became 8 signed boards.

- Debbie and Roger Musser made a large cross

- Someone brought a flag pole and flag

- a bench was set up

- as the people from town, walked or drove by they would stop and sign the board, leaving flowers, small flags, notes, teddy bears angels, and all kinds of tributes. Soon others as they were looking for the crash sight began stopping to sign the board or leave something. People came from everywhere. A wreath with a note attached that said "Thanks for saving us" signed, "Capital Hill Employees," was left at this sight.

For our town's 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2002 parade the people from Shanksville put together a "Living American Flag" of 273 people to honor our nation and the local volunteers who responded to the crash of Flight 93. On Veterans Day Nov 2002, the townspeople decided to put 14 permanent poles and flags in individuals yards....there are 14. The fire truck hoses are red, white, and blue with a plaque listing the names of the passengers and crew on the side of the truck,

In late Oct 2001 the temporary memorial was opened to the public. Visitors at the sight were often confused and did not know where Flight 93 actually crashed. They were taking pictures of the wrong place and coming to the wrong conclusions. After observing this and talking with others, Donna Glessner, a local resident, announced a meeting on Saturday, January 26, 2002. There were 17 people who came together and agreed that someone needed to be at the crash to greet the visitors and give accurate information.

The Ambassadors initially began volunteering on week-ends. We now have 40 volunteer Ambassadors who staff the sight every day. Official information and pictures were put together to form an Ambassador Book that we show to anyone who wants to see them. In the summer we are there from 10am till dark and in the winter from 10am till 4pm.

Many of the Ambassadors would tell you they volunteer simply because we feel we are needed. We believe our purpose is to honor those who died on Flight 93, to give accurate information, answer questions, help take pictures, hold a hand, give a hug, cry with them, stand in silence with them, and provide a listening ear to those who want to share what they were doing when they heard about 9-11, or share their feelings of how this day has changed their lives.

People from all over the world come to visit the temporary memorial overlooking the Flight 93 crash site in Stonycreek Township, Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Well over 130,000 people have come each year. At this time we are greeting more than 5,000 visitors every week. In the month of June 2005, we met over 13,000 visitors from all 50 states and 19 different countries. Many times I have had to speak thru an interpreter. Once the permanent memorial is built, the attendance is expected to triple.

At the sight are many wonderful tributes. The Somerset County Commissioners, Jim Marker, Brad Cober and Pamela Tokar-Iches placed up a bronze plaque affixed to a granite marker bearing the names of the passengers and crew along with flagpoles which fly the United States and Pennsylvania State Flag. A large wooded cross draped in a white cloth was erected near the Command Post by a few men and women from the Somerset Christian Missionary Alliance Church with the help of Pastor James Vandervort, to offer comfort and hope to the arriving families of the hero's of Flight 93. The cross now stands at the temporary memorial. Doug Baeckel and Paul Bomboy, PBS Coal Company employees climbed the 200 foot boom of a dragline used to do the surface coal mining and put up a huge American flag. The flag could be seen for many miles and became a symbol of the Flight 93 crash site. That flag has since been replaced by a 21 foot long flagpole and a flag measuring 10 feet by 15 feet. We thank Representative Bob Bastian and Congressman Shuster's Office for supplying the flags. Herbert Erdmenger from Guatemala has sent two large black granite plaques, one weighing 450 pounds because he has "a very deep appreciation for our country and its role in upholding the principle of freedom." A 1400 pound stone by the American 9-11 Ride Foundation motorcycle riders group is on display. There are wood and concrete benches built by the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at Spring Valley School in Farmington, Pennsylvania, and forty slate "freedom angels" created by Tammy and Eric Pearson.

We meet many interesting people from all over the world who come to pray, meditate and reflect at the sight, incredible things happen there. I have personally met a woman that was trapped in the Pentagon rubble and she told me how difficult it was for her to go back to work and I held her for a long time as we cried together. I spoke to a nurse that treated the injured at the pentagon and help identify the dead, who after being at the sight was finally able to talk about it for the first time. I saw young men who were air marshals about to graduate spending a very long time at the sight, trying to take in the seriousness of their soon jobs to be. I especially remember a Native American Indian sitting in his native costume in 22 inches of snow and was 18 below zero to meditate and show his respect. People have come from other parts of the world that are moved to tears

and tell us how fortunate we are to live in the United States of America. Veterans are especially moved at this sight.

Many visitors feel compelled to leave something at the memorial fence as a tribute, in honor of the courageous actions of the crew and passengers of Flight 93. Among these tributes are a flight attendants uniform, military ribbons and medals, a pair of military boots with a message telling their history, Bibles, patches, hats, signed rocks, t-shirts, flowers, children's toys, a wedding band, a newspaper article on the fence "Symbol of faith"- "Bible survives fiery Flight 93 crash". A few years ago a young man who came was so moved by being there, he took the sandals off his feet and left them.

Their tributes remain at the memorial where others can see and appreciate them for as long as possible. Periodically, things which cannot remain outdoors due to the weather are brought into the National Park Service office in Somerset where the Curator Barbara Black with the help of volunteers, has them cleaned, catalogued and stored, to be part of the permanent archives. To date we have more than 20,000 items in this collection.

We have bound books to write in or slips of paper for visitors to leave at the memorial and many are especially meaningful. A man from Milwaukee wrote: "Thank you for your sacrifice. Our country is better today because of your heroism yesterday." A woman from New Hampshire wrote this message: "Please add my grateful thanks for the sacrifices given by your loved ones. My son works on Capital Hill-the Hart Building- and I feel he was saved because of the heroes of Flight 93" A gentleman named Dan wrote these words: "I am an American soldier in a reserve force looking to go to Iraq in September. The heroism of the crew and passengers of Flight 93 inspires me to be the best I can be for my country. The wife of a Washington D.C. firefighter told us this: "your acts impacted our lives personally....You have inspired us to live more passionately, with deep conviction, according to what is right and good in this world." One of the main things written and said at the sight is "God Bless America" and "God bless you", to the Hero's and families of Flight 93"

There is much being done at the Temporary Memorial. We are in the process of an Oral History Project where thousands of eyewitnesses, first responders or anyone who participated in this site will be taped and documented to preserve this historical account

People were so moved by this sight that there were 1063 entries to the Permanent Memorial Design Competition. Now the top 5 designs are being displayed in Somerset. The jury will announce the winning design on September 7<sup>th</sup> here in Washington D.C.

There have been many memorials to honor the acts of courage and sacrifice of the passengers and crew of Flight 93 some of these are:

- Doug and Judy Baeckel's front yard in Shanksville,
- Roxanne Sullivan who lives by the crash site started a memorial at the end of Skyline Road,
- "the hay bale memorial",

-There is a United Flight 93 Memorial Sculpture and Garden at the Shanksville Stonycreek School.

In the back of this room there is a display table of many items, some are on loan to me from the Flight 93 permanent archives. Ambassador Chuck Wagner's photographs and a Flight 93 worn flag, and other interesting items. I hope you will have time to look at them.

We are grateful for all your efforts to see that the Permanent Memorial is built at the site in Stonycreek Township Pennsylvania, where we saw the resolve, strength and courage of these 40 (one of who was pregnant) very brave people to overcome their fears, and in their action, was heard around the world. These men and women who were only about 15 to 20 minutes away from Washington, D.C, came together to stop terrible destructive action by the terrorists and turning this sight into a place of victory. How different our nation would be if the terrorists had hit their target. I'm reminded of the Bible verse in John 15.13 that says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." They laid down their lives for you and me, not even friends but strangers. This reclaimed peaceful strip mining field is the final resting place for these Hero's of Flight 93. This Memorial is needed so we as a nation and world have a place to grieve and show respect for what has happened to our country, a place for healing to start and to inspire all who come. The Flight 93 National Memorial Mission Statement says it so well, "May all who visit this place remember the collective acts of courage and sacrifice of the passengers and crew, revere this hallowed ground as the final resting place of those heroes, and reflect on the power of individuals who choose to make a difference."

Therefore, it is certainly fitting that a plaque in honor of the passengers and crew of Flight 93 should be placed in this, our nation's capital, so all who come to visit can likewise read it and reflect for this and all generations to come to never forget the events that took place on September 11, 2001. The Flight 93 National Memorial Mission Statement so wonderfully states it as "A common field one day, A field of honor forever."

In closing I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity of testifying before you here today. It is truly an honor. It was very hard to tell you just a few things when there are so many that could be told, but I have done my best. Please know that there are many people who are thankful for all that you do here for us and that we are praying for you.

Thank-You.

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Mary Alice Mankamyer

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